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# **“Keep-a-fighting! Play the game!”**

## **Baseball and the Canadian forces during the First World War**

**Andrew Horrall**

Lester B. Pearson wrote the examination for the Department of External Affairs in June 1928. Having passed, Pearson was interviewed by a committee that included a representative of the War Veterans' Association, whose job it was to ensure that returned servicemen received preferential treatment in federal government hiring. When asked by this panellist to expound on his wartime service, Pearson could think only of fatigue duties and "my home run at Bramshott Camp when I was playing third base for the 4th Reserve Battalion team." According to Pearson, these anecdotes impressed his questioners and, of course, he was offered a job.<sup>1</sup> Whether it documented Pearson's interview accurately or not, this articulation of his war-time experiences emphasised the important role played by sport, and especially baseball, for Canadian soldiers of the First World War.

Despite a growing list of investigations of the personal "experience" of war, the importance of sport in the Canadian forces during the First World War remains almost undocumented, save in memoirs or as a subordinate component of morale and recruiting.<sup>2</sup> However, military sport began almost as soon as men assembled in Canadian training camps. These earliest matches were sponsored by junior officers and chaplains who believed in the moral values with which sport had been imbued by the British since the middle of the nineteenth century. To their first sponsors, team sports were undoubtedly seen as a means of testing men's leadership abilities, building cohesion and as a salubrious alternative to carousing, gambling

and brothels. Canadian soldiers played a number of different sports during the war. Of the most popular, baseball was the most distinctly North American. It had thrice failed to take hold in Britain during the 40 years before the war, was never seen as an allegory for virtue and honour and therefore provides a distinct way in which Canadian forces differed from those representing other parts of the empire.<sup>3</sup>

A short summary of Victorian sport is necessary in order to understand the context of First World War baseball. Modern sport originated in the demographic and social upheavals of mid-nineteenth century England. Industrialisation had drawn people into new cities, displacing the village as the basic demographic unit and eclipsing squierarchical social controls. In the process, a growing, and increasingly affluent, urban middle-class began sending their sons to the public schools that had once been the preserve of the aristocracy and gentry. In very short order they demanded that these schools, which had often been anarchic and brutal, be brought under the control of masters and older boys in a system embodied by Rugby School near Birmingham.

Under the rubric "Muscular Christianity," games became allegories for spiritual virtue, moral rectitude, and "manliness," qualities needed to conquer and control both schools and empires. As this revised curriculum took hold throughout the empire, middle-class children were taught a Muscular Christian mythology communicated by such popular dictums as



First World War recruiting posters used sporting themes to encourage enlistment.

Wellington's that "Waterloo had been won on the playing fields of Eton."<sup>4</sup> These public school ideals reached the working-classes through organisations like the Boys Brigade and the Boy Scouts and thanks to an enormous hagiographic literature, beginning with *Tom Brown's Schooldays* and begetting an unending supply of boys' adventure stories. But no parable expressed the ideals of muscular Christianity like Henry Newbolt's 1892 panegyric *Vitae Lampada*. The poem opens with an unnamed school's cricket captain rallying his team to victory in the failing light. Years later the boy, serving as a subaltern in a distant desert, exhorts his men to fight on despite the square having broken and the sand being stained red with British blood. Finally, a younger generation of boys are inspired by this lesson of duty learned within the school's cloisters. In each instance "Play up, and play the game!" was the rallying cry. Newbolt's words encapsulated the Muscular Christian belief that sport readied young men for war. Though these ideals were not unknown in Edwardian Canada, baseball was never associated with them.<sup>5</sup>

Thanks to such images, sport became an important medium through which Imperial ideals were transmitted. Finding it difficult to continue playing games which had varied considerably from school to school, young men at university, in the military, the clergy and the civil service created the international rules for association football, or soccer, rugby and other sports. These games then spread throughout the British Isles as men founded clubs designed to provide the working-classes with an alternative to the public house. Simultaneously, British engineers, immigrants, missionaries, soldiers and businessmen took these games to the corners of the world. With the development of efficient and reliable regional, national and international transport, competitions emerged that turned participatory sports into a profitable entertainment business played in stadiums by clubs representing local areas. But gentlemen looked down on the idea of earning their livings at games. Therefore, the last three decades of the nineteenth century witnessed a running battle between advocates of amateurism under which a gentleman - who likely had a private

income - would not deign to earn money from playing a game, and the working-class lads for whom being paid to kick a ball about was enormously more attractive than working in a mill or a mine.

Introduced to the colonies by an Anglophile, British middle-class, based mainly in the private clubs of Montreal and Toronto, Canadian sport was the product of a similar blend of gentlemanly ideals, industrialisation and urbanisation. Members of these exclusive social groups supervised competitions, ensured that sport became a central component of education in the colony's private schools and wrote amateur rules for the native North American games of lacrosse and snowshoeing. By sponsoring championship cups for football and hockey, Governors-General Grey and Stanley epitomised this Anglophile sporting vision. Such ennobling impulses were challenged by municipal governments who cemented public sport in Canadian life by laying-out playing fields, while railways facilitated competition between towns and cities, spread sport to the west and enabled those living in the remotest regions to order equipment from retail catalogues.<sup>6</sup>

Baseball led this democratic impulse. Though derived from the English game of rounders, baseball was an American invention that was neither sponsored by, nor subject to, gentlemanly ideals. Baseball had been played in Ontario since the late 1830s, while the country's first permanent clubs, in Hamilton and London, were formed in the mid-1850s. For the next two decades teams adhering to different rules sprouted in villages, towns and cities throughout the colonies. Canadian baseball came of age during the 1870s when the modern, or New York, rules were adopted by leagues across the country. Next, businessmen sponsored teams as a means of promoting their products, professional players were recruited in the United States, and the Canadian Association of Baseball Players was founded. If critics contended that baseball's popularity augured the dominant influence of American culture, as Bruce Kidd has noted "only ice hockey and baseball were played by significant numbers all across Canada, and only baseball drew players and spectators from all classes."<sup>7</sup> Baseball's immense popularity crossed class and geographic barriers making it immune to gentlemanly morality.

*Vitae Lampada* proclaimed that the virtues instilled by gentlemanly sport were meant to prepare men for war, and so in August 1914, public figures in both Britain and Australia began demanding that sport be curtailed. The English soccer season continued until May 1915, though clubs deflected criticism by sponsoring recruiting rallies and allowing troops to drill in their stadiums.<sup>8</sup> However, when Lord Derby, Chairman of the Football Association, and soon to be chief architect of British conscription, handed out that season's championship medals, he declared that it was time for young men to engage in a "sterner game for England." Professional soccer, the most popular sport in Britain, was abandoned until the peace. The Australian response was similar, with the press, church, parliament and leading citizens making it clear that sportsmen belonged in uniform.<sup>9</sup>

This debate was neither so heated nor so explicit in Canada. An implied criticism of sport was carried on in the early months of the war through reams of newspapers reporting star athletes who had enlisted, sports leagues collapsing for lack of players and speeches such as that of Thomas Boyd, president of the Amateur Athletic Union of Canada, who in mid-1915 called for competitive leagues to be disbanded.<sup>10</sup> Many athletes responded to this message by enlisting, while the government requisitioned many sports fields for use as training grounds.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, such Anglophile sentiments competed with the powerful, omnipresent example of the neutral United States where professional sport, and especially baseball, carried on unabated. Canadian newspapers reflected this tension by carrying many stories about Ty Cobb and other American professionals for every call to end sport at home.

Though debate about sport's role in the conflict was not as strident as in some other parts of the empire, men enlisted in great enthusiastic waves during the war's earliest days. It soon became widely known, thanks to press reports of leading sportsmen who had joined up, sports days at Canadian military camps and speeches at recruiting rallies, that those who enlisted would not lack opportunities for sport. Men lured into uniform on this implicit promise were not disappointed. Competitive games were integrated into military life from the moment



NAC PA 227

The baseball team of No.3 Field Ambulance, Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps, July 1916.

many units arrived at Valcartier, Niagara, Petawawa and other training camps, and carried on aboard the ships that ferried troops to England.<sup>12</sup> Even if home was increasingly physically attenuated, by the time troops reached Europe they had identified baseball as a means of bridging this distance, for as one member of the 58th Battery, Canadian Field Artillery noted, "one can almost picture himself back in Canada watching a lot of kids on the sand lots working out to be big leaguers."<sup>13</sup> Such a strong emotional reaction to the game was unforeseen by officers who had promoted sport to provide constructive recreation and in the hopes of imparting martial and moral virtues.

In spite of the popularity of baseball matches in Canadian units, the formal incorporation of sport into military life did not occur quickly. This was to be a short war characterised by swift, constant troop movements. Sporting contests in training camps and on troop ships could be construed as building cohesion and morale, but it was anticipated that in the field there would be few opportunities for games\*. However, by the time the 1st Canadian Division arrived in Europe in early 1915, static trench warfare had descended on the battlefields of Europe. In order to maintain fighting efficiency, military commanders developed a system in which units rotated regularly between front line, reserve and rest areas. As a result, troops spent relatively

long intervals behind the lines where opportunities for sport were greater. The response was immediate, predictable and fairly uniform. As they would for much of the next three years, junior officers, chaplains and civilians promoted sport in Europe as an antidote to this sedentary war.<sup>14</sup>

Meanwhile, Canadians at home learned of these developments almost immediately thanks to speeches like that of a private Nurse, a wounded veteran of Flanders, who addressed a Toronto recruiting rally in July 1915 by saying "we've got a big job on over there. But there's some fun too. We've got a lot of baseball and we need pitchers."<sup>15</sup> The crowd laughed and cheered, implying consent, based at least partly on established imperial ideals, for military sport. But Nurse had not simply turned this phrase for rhetorical effect, because baseball leagues were already attracting crowds of spectators amongst the Canadian units in England and in Flanders.<sup>16</sup>

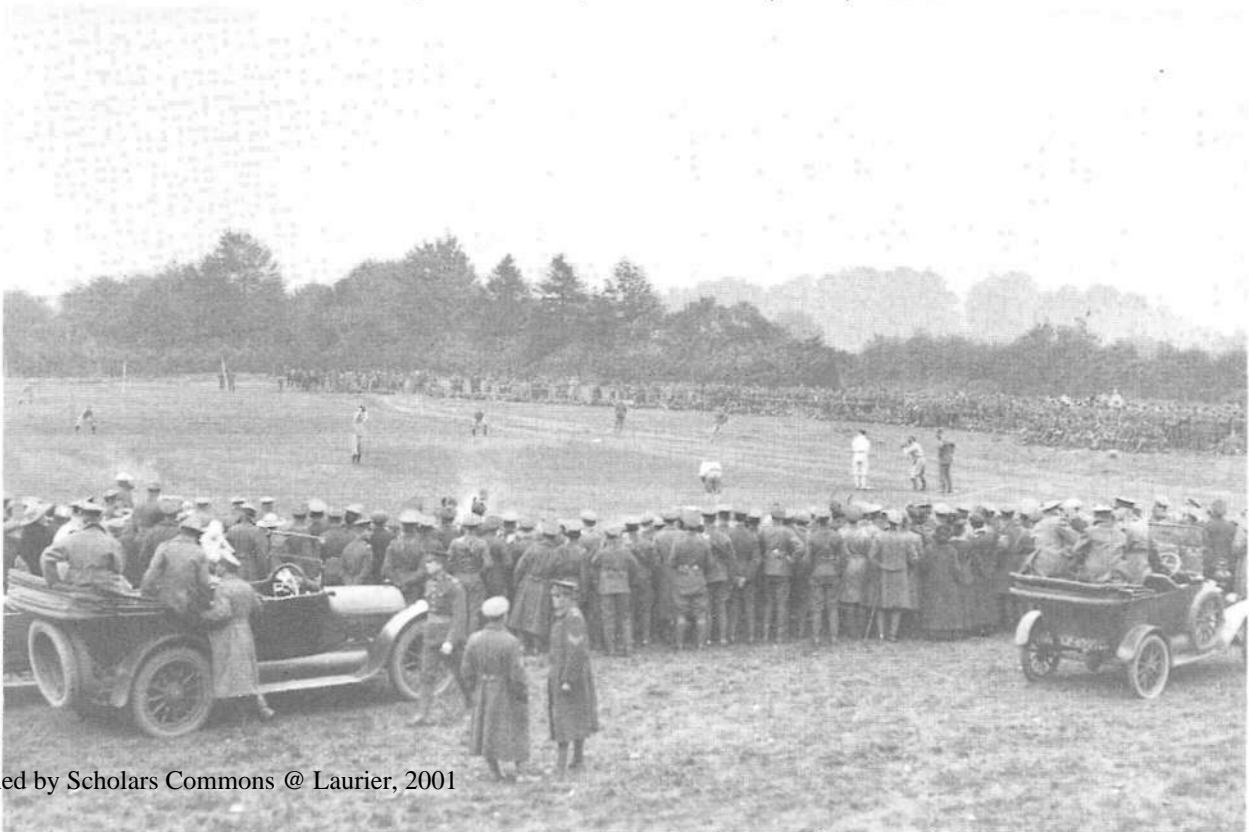
The response of civilians in Canada, the United States and elsewhere was further proof of this grass roots support for baseball at the front. If baseball equipment was not easy to come by in Europe, then it would be donated. In May 1915 the American League sent a "big assortment of baseball paraphernalia" to Sir Sam Hughes for distribution amongst Canadian

units.<sup>17</sup> Later that summer, Lord Atholstan's *Montreal Star* sent a similar shipment directly to England.<sup>18</sup> Such efforts were coordinated after the middle of 1915 by the Canadian Army Field Comforts Commission, or CFCC, which had been established by the Dominion government. Headquartered at Shorncliffe, but with offices from Halifax to Vancouver and as far afield as Capetown and Colombo, the CFCC solicited soldiers' needs and communicated them back to Canada.<sup>19</sup> The Commission publicised its work in *Home Comforts*, a magazine that mixed advice on what to knit the troops, up-beat articles about the soldiers' lives in France, and letters from men overseas thanking the CFCC for the parcels they had received.<sup>20</sup> The frequency with which baseball equipment was requested by the men that first summer demonstrated that the sport was already the most popular amongst Canadian forces.<sup>21</sup> The supremacy of baseball in the CEF also gave the few existing English clubs more opportunities to play than they had ever before enjoyed. The pre-war highlights of one such London team had included matches against visiting American wild west shows and US Navy ships.<sup>22</sup> Their manager was understandably enthusiastic about opportunities to play Canadian units.

By writing to the CFCC over the winter requesting baseball, football, cricket and boxing

equipment, individual officers further established sport in the public mind as one of the basic necessities for fighting men.<sup>23</sup> In Ottawa, at least, this link was solidified in May 1916 by advertisements for the 207th battalion that were emblazoned with large photographs of military sports competitions and testimonials to the "enjoyment and bodily improvement" to be had in the battalion's athletics, sculling, football and baseball teams.<sup>24</sup> As the casualty lists lengthened, fewer Canadians saw war as a game; a view supported by such images because they conveyed no hint of the battle^field or "duty." Instead, these photographs portrayed military life as an opportunity for exercise, competition and comradeship. That summer the CFCC declared that apart from socks Canadian troops did not need clothing. Instead, games, magazines, books, musical instruments and, tellingly, baseball equipment were valued above all by the men. Bats, balls and gloves were expensive, and though many were donated in Canada, such charity alone could not satisfy the demand for baseball. Therefore, in April 1916 the CFCC had opened a "patriotic tea room" in Folkestone whose proceeds were used to purchase baseball equipment.<sup>25</sup> With recruiters vaunting sport and organisations like the CFCC publicising the need for equipment, when the soldiers' newspaper, the *Iodine Chronicle's* commented that summer that "little did we

A baseball match between Epsom Canadians and 198th Battalion at Godalming, October 1917, one of the Championship Games.





NAC PA 2590

Baseball game in which British, Canadian and Australian troops took part. May, 1918.

dream when we left the Land of the Maple, that we'd be playing the National Game behind the firing line in France six months later" its readers must have been slightly bemused.<sup>26</sup>

While still not officially incorporated into the military structure, these signs of baseball's increasing prominence were all evidence that by early 1916 military commanders were becoming convinced of the value of promoting sport. In England, the Headquarters of the Canadian Training Division encouraged all units to organise sports, while in Flanders the YMCA, believing "the sporting instinct of the Canadian on active service is not to be overlooked," established committees in units to organise matches.<sup>27</sup> These informal bodies created the structure to which military baseball adhered for the next three summers. Firstly, competitive leagues were founded at English and European bases and hospitals like Orpington, Buxton, and Bovington where, as one correspondent testified, "baseball takes over in the evenings."<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, sport remained firmly subordinate to other duties. The Army Council's July decree that "in no circumstances whatever are sports of any description to be held in Units during Sunday mornings at a time when they would clash with Parade Services" demonstrated both the growing popularity of sport and lingering unease amongst military leaders about how to incorporate it into daily activity.<sup>29</sup>

If the top brass remained unconvinced, individual testimonials at rallies, in newspapers, letters and army orders demonstrated that by 1916 many Canadian soldiers expected to play baseball. However cautiously, military commanders accommodated these wishes. Soldiers who preferred to watch the game were catered for in a different way. Their desires were more difficult to accommodate within the military conception of building physical fitness and cohesion by playing the game. Nevertheless, first steps towards "professional" or spectator baseball, in which large crowds watched elite teams, were taken in May 1916 when the YMCA staged an Empire Day Sports Meeting in Flanders. This day of athletic contests concluded, as most would from then on, with a baseball double-header featuring the 1st Canadian Field Ambulance team lead by Colonel Arthur Ross, who was the unit's commanding officer, its catcher and clean-up hitter.<sup>30</sup>

These ambulancemen were fortunate because the permission to compete in such sports events remained at the Commanding Officer's discretion.<sup>31</sup> Though commanders retained this power, the number of baseball matches being played throughout the CEF created a momentum for the sport that could not be stopped. For the first time, the Canadian high command responded swiftly and surely. That July commanding officers of Canadian



units were told to send their best ball players to try-out for all-star teams that would compete at a "Grand Naval & Military Sports Carnival" that was to be staged the following month at Stamford Bridge, the largest stadium in London.<sup>32</sup> Subscriptions of ten guineas per brigade were to have financed the event but the organisers' financial predictions had been inaccurate, forcing them to apply to Ottawa for public money with which to pay the substantial deficit.<sup>33</sup> This invisible government support became public in October when Sir Sam Hughes pitched the first ball at a London match between a Canadian team from Epsom and a team of touring American all-stars. Attending the game with the Duchess of Devonshire, wife of the newly-appointed Governor-General, Sir Sam must have been proud that her introduction to Canadian culture saw Epsom win convincingly.<sup>34</sup> Such prominent matches were covered extensively in the British press, but subsidiary tournaments like those staged by the Artillery at Shorncliffe were watched by many more soldiers, helping less publicly to cement the position of military baseball as a spectator sport.<sup>35</sup>

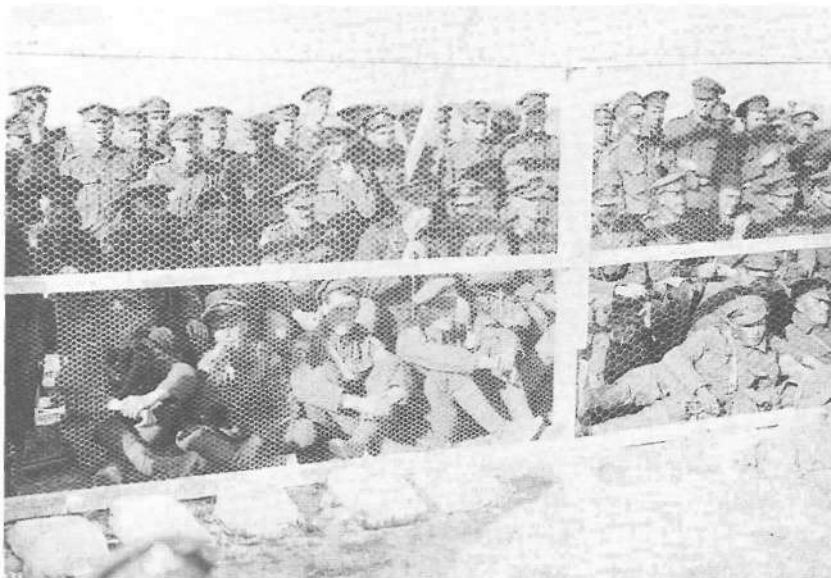
Even if baseball had become the preeminent sport in the CEF, and had received Hughes's public backing in 1916, some war leaders remained reluctant to endorse the game publicly. Sensing how important baseball had become for the war effort, in June 1917 Toronto's Sportsmen's Patriotic Association enquired of Sir Edward Kemp, Minister of the Overseas Military Forces of Canada, why, when the Americans had begun doing so almost from the moment they had entered that war, did not the Canadian government furnish its troops with sports equipment.<sup>36</sup> Kemp's reply voiced war leaders' sometimes paradoxical views about sport. While defending the government's record of supplying such sporting materials as boxing gloves that were important for the men's physical training, Kemp - who had personally authorised the payment for the 1916 Stamford Bridge event - argued that with regard to "recreational" sports, the government's sole responsibility was to help ship equipment like baseballs and footballs that had been privately donated.<sup>37</sup> Not all leaders were as politic on the question of sport. That summer Brigadier Thomas Welch refused to sanction competitive sports, or allow government transport to be used to ferry teams to games. Despite the overwhelmingly positive

public reaction to military sport since the start of the war, Welch ordered that games held in his command be hidden from the press. Furthermore, so as to ensure that none of his men were being excused from duty in order to play, teams were to be composed of those who happened to have the afternoon off.<sup>38</sup>

Despite such comments, it is clear that by early 1917 few senior officers shared Welch's retrograde views. Under the tacit consent of their commanders, units throughout the CEF established committees like Cliveden's Connaught Athletic Club, the No.4 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station Social and Athletic Club, the 5th Canadian Division Athletic Association and the Aldershot Command Athletic Association, to advocate for, schedule and finance sports.<sup>39</sup> Such committees were often headed by an aristocrat and relied heavily on sympathetic officers like Colonel G. Godson-Godson. Godson was elected Vice-President of the Canadian Army Pay Corps Baseball team in April and immediately set about fulfilling the growing desire for top-level sport he perceived amongst London-area troops. The arrival of American doughboys that spring had further increased the demand for baseball. Therefore, Godson proposed establishing a metropolitan sporting association, sponsored by the commanders of 24 units in the London area, that would oversee competitions in baseball, cricket and tennis.<sup>40</sup> Godson's dream was to see regular games between crack teams being watched by large crowds creating, in effect, a professional baseball league.

That Godson's idea for a formal professional championship structure was stillborn did not indicate diminishing enthusiasm for military baseball in units either at home or overseas. As it had been the previous year, the baseball season was kicked off by Empire Day matches in London and at Godalming, Witley and the Massey-Harris Convalescent Home, Dulwich.<sup>41</sup> Two months later, the 50th anniversary of Confederation was celebrated with baseball matches at Cliveden and Ramsgate. Moreover, twice in July upwards of 10,000 fans saw baseball matches between Canadian and American teams at Lord's Cricket ground in London.<sup>42</sup> All-star teams for these holiday matches were drawn from the best players in the Canadian leagues at Bexhill, London and





NAC PA 1926



NAC PA 6628

**Top:** General Sir Arthur Currie (seated in middle, hands on cane) behind the screen at a baseball game at the front. September, 1917.

**Above:** Canadian Baseball Teams. Inter-Allied Games, Pershing Stadium, Paris, July 1919.

Witley where, so Toronto fans were assured, Lou Grove, one of the city's best players, was a star pitcher.<sup>43</sup> Though the American professional leagues had not shut down, the entrance of the United States into the war saw increasing numbers of top-level professional baseball players in uniform. While the talent on Canadian unit teams probably remained fairly constant, major leaguers soon formed the core of both Canadian and American all-star teams. Their presence created a championship mentality amongst players and spectators, but, in the absence of any formal CEF-wide mechanism for determining the strongest team, that autumn Epsom crowned themselves "champions of the

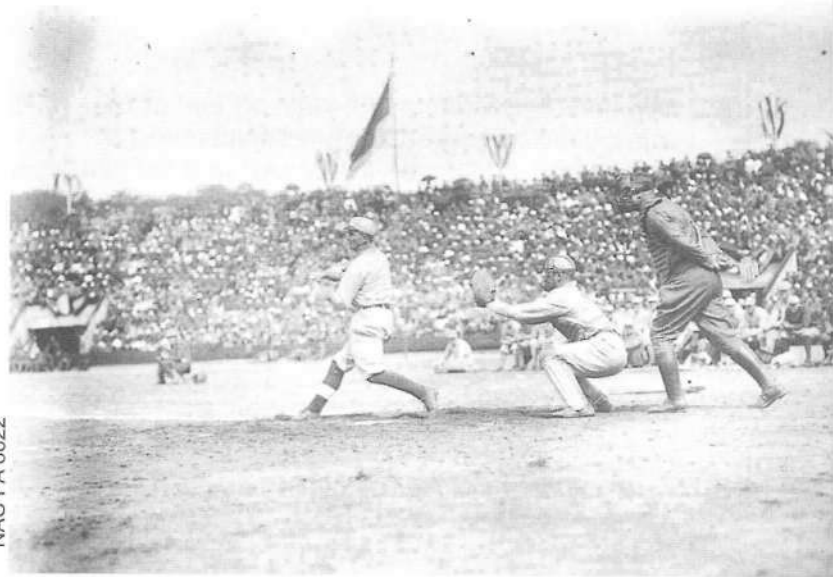
Canadian Overseas Forces in England."<sup>44</sup> Emulating what the most famous major leaguers had been doing for decades, once the season was over Canadian and American all-star teams played a series of promotional matches throughout Ireland, further cementing many soldiers' perception that top-class baseball had been transferred to the British Isles.<sup>45</sup> These endeavours were supported by Canadian military authorities who arranged for special trains to take teams and their supporters to matches and distributed tickets to important London games to the commanders of the various Canadian units and hospitals.

The emergence in 1917 of what was in effect professional baseball amongst Canadian and American forces in England, and the continued popularity of participatory competitions throughout Europe, propelled Canadian Headquarters to publicly declare its views on sport. Foes of the game like Welch were probably never silenced but the Canadian General Staff, declaring sport's unique ability to help men "recall the pleasanter circumstances of man's normal existence" and thereby enable them to "return to training with renewed vitality, and increased mental vigor," incorporated sport into military life in December 1917 by publishing *A Guide to Military Sports and Recreational Training*. The *Guide* stated that games, especially baseball, football, boxing, tug-of-war, athletics, basketball, hockey and wrestling, should be encouraged by commanders. Its authors rationalised sport in military terms by incorporating muscular Christian ideals, claiming that the participation of officers would ensure that matches took place with "the true sporting spirit" and would thereby encourage *esprit de corps* through the promotion the ideals of "self sacrifice." In addition, the *Guide* laid down official rules for each sport and fulfilled Godson's visions with a four-tier competitive structure comprising battalion, regiment, area, and inter-area matches that would ultimately identify national champions.<sup>46</sup> Sensing the growing importance of games between "professional" all-star teams and the increasing division between those who played and those who watched that this threatened to create, the *Guide* stated that all servicemen should be given

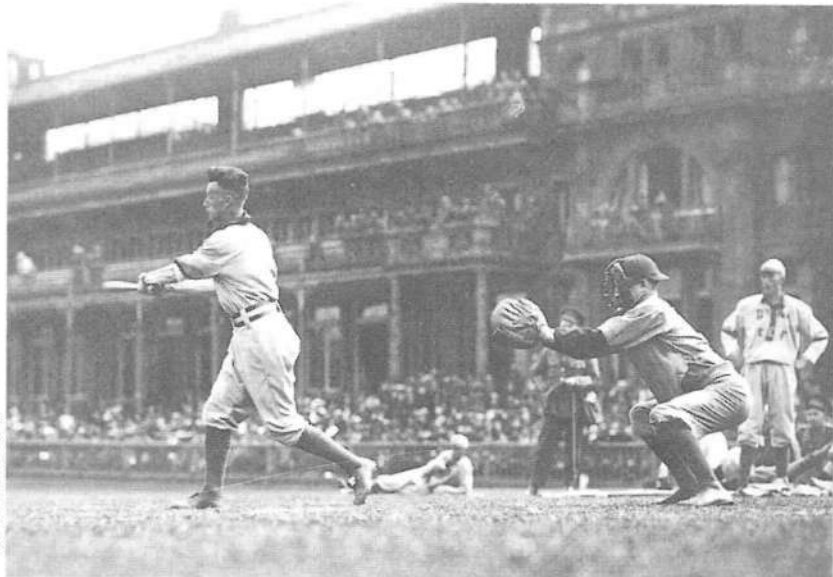
access to sport. In effect, the *Guide* officially recognised the work of the local sporting associations that had appeared throughout the Canadian forces since the beginning of the war.

The concepts articulated in the *Guide* became real when commanders of Canadian units in England were asked to send delegates to the Canadian Military Athletic Association, or CMAA. The CMAA's first meeting at Argyll House, London in January 1918 declared its mandate "to inaugurate Athletics, and Athletical Competitions between Canadian units in Great Britain" and also "to standardise Athletic Contests of all kinds."<sup>47</sup> Under its president, Lieutenant-General Richard Turner, and an executive committee of staff officers, the CMAA oversaw baseball, soccer, boxing, athletics and wrestling. These competitions were financed by a quarterly subscription of £1 per unit and took place in each of six commands; Shorncliffe, Bramshott, Seaford, 5th Canadian Division, Bexhill and London. Local committees ran leagues within their areas, reported results to the National Office, which appointed referees, judges and umpires, provided prizes, and arranged inter-area matches that determined national champions in each sport.<sup>48</sup> In mid-January the CMAA's second meeting emphasised more strongly that sport was meant primarily to be played and not watched. Sensing that top players might be "traded" between units, the CMAA also declared that men had to have been on the strength of a unit for at least one month before they could represent it at sports.<sup>49</sup> By April the CMAA had secured a permanent stadium at Norbury, London in which it would stage national championships in the various sports.<sup>50</sup>

CMAA organisation and the official sanction for spectator sports that it represented meant that the last summer of the war saw more baseball played than ever before. The season kicked-off at Reading on Easter Monday when 7,000 spectators saw all-star Canadian and American teams.<sup>51</sup> The match-up was then repeated before 13,000 people at Swansea.<sup>52</sup> This pre-season prepared men for the league competitions that were inaugurated on 25 May



NAC PA 6622



NAC PA 22669

**Top:** A baseball between Canada and United States during the Inter-Allied Games at Pershing Stadium, Paris, July 1919. "Doc" Edis is batting.

**Above:** Baseball at Lords. Canadians vs. Americans.

when the American Army met the Canadian Pay Corps.<sup>53</sup> Five weeks later Dominion Day was again the focus of Canadian baseball activity, with matches held at Norbury, Bramshott, Seaford, Shorncliffe, Cooden, the Canadian General Base Depot and Cliveden Hospital.<sup>54</sup> Meanwhile, the most famous Canadian military sporting event of the war took place on 1 July 1918 when some 70,000 troops, accompanied by the Duke of Connaught, Prime Minister Sir Robert Borden, Corps Commander Sir Arthur Currie and other dignitaries gathered in a specially constructed stadium near Paris. There they watched an afternoon of running, wrestling and boxing, that was capped by a baseball match between all-star teams representing the 1st and 3rd Canadian

Divisions.<sup>55</sup> Desmond Morton's argument that this Dominion Day sports meet symbolised the pride of an independent, strong, well-trained Canadian Corps acknowledges sport's role as one of the most powerful modern symbols of local, regional and national pride.<sup>56</sup> But sharp focus on this event risks obscuring the four year evolution of sport within the Canadian forces and the final acknowledgement of its importance by military leaders that was epitomised by the 1918 Dominion Day Sports.

That same year American Independence was celebrated with a boosterism well beyond what Canadians could muster. On the fourth of July, 40,000 spectators jammed Stamford Bridge to see the King present the first ball at a match between the traditional American rivals, Army and Navy. The players had been feted by American officials at the Savoy Hotel over lunch, before parading in their uniforms through central London in horse-drawn carriages. Though nominally representing two branches of the American military, no one denied that both teams were composed of major leaguers whose wartime duties had been to play baseball for their country.<sup>57</sup>

Canadian military baseball may not have reached the levels of professionalism of its American counterpart, but such holiday matches were now tied more concretely to the participatory leagues than they had ever been. Canadian all-star teams were selected from the local area leagues and CMAA statistics hint at how bountiful the crop of talent must have been. Some three hundred matches were played in May by men of the 2nd Canadian Division alone, while a further 250 were played at Shorncliffe the following month.<sup>58</sup> In both cases baseball was played significantly more often than any other sport. Even in the last summer of the war, when demands on manpower were unprecedented, the Southeast Coast Military Baseball League, comprising seven Canadian units, hospitals, RAF cadets and the Army Service Corps managed to complete a 12 game season. For winning the championship the team representing the Princess Patricia's Red Cross Hospital was awarded a trip to London, where they watched Canadian and American teams compete at Stamford Bridge. They then toured the country playing exhibition matches against the strongest teams from other leagues.<sup>59</sup> At the same time

the Canadian Training School, Bexhill boasted its own a six-team league, something that was common wherever significant numbers of Canadian troops were found.<sup>60</sup> Meanwhile, spontaneous, pick-up games were also possible thanks to the baseball equipment that could be borrowed without charge from the clubs and refreshment huts that had been established throughout the country to entertain North American troops.<sup>61</sup>

As a result of the CMAA's competitive structure, Epsom could no longer simply declare themselves the Canadian baseball champions. CMAA encomiums about gentlemanly play aside, the quarter-final match between Shorncliffe and Seaford on 4 September was marred by the umpire's decision to call one of the Seaford men out for interfering with a base runner. Seaford had then declared that they would only resume the match under protest, causing Shorncliffe to march off the field. The chairman of the CMAA Baseball sub-committee then ordered Shorncliffe to resume the game. They refused. Nor would they agree to a rematch. Therefore, Seaford was advanced, only to be defeated by Epsom in the semi-final.<sup>62</sup> Ill-feeling over the incident ran deep, and Shorncliffe boycotted a CMAA swimming meet held the same week.<sup>63</sup> Despite having played for Sir Sam Hughes and declaring themselves champions in previous years, Epsom lost in the final to the Canadian Engineers Training Centre. The Engineers went on to beat the strongest American team and became champions of the British Isles.<sup>64</sup> At this international final the stands overflowed with soldiers, civilians and ladies causing at least one reporter to remark optimistically that "a certain element in this country of a younger and more gingery generation" would continue to play after the war.<sup>65</sup>

One of the reasons military leaders took so long to begin promoting sport officially was that like military campaigning, sport was essentially a summertime activity. As such, formal competitions might draw men away from the battlefield. This probably helps to explain why the CMAA's mandate was restricted to units in England with those in Flanders continuing to rely on the enthusiasm of individual commanders and YMCA men. No matter the official view of sport, organising events had often been a difficult task for, as the *Canadian*

*Sapper's* correspondent wrote in February 1918, "to attempt to dope out prospects of a baseball season two months in advance, without taking into consideration what the Hun and the MO [Medical Officer] may do in the meantime, is, to say the least, a trifle risky."<sup>66</sup> Such impediments to regular play were never more apparent than during the 1918 season when an acute shortage of baseballs, combined with the unprecedented casualties in the war's final, fast moving campaigns and the Spanish influenza pandemic disrupted the season. But even then Flanders baseball had champions like British Lieutenant-General Sir Aylmer Haldane who donated a trophy for a tournament at the Bellacourt sports field between teams representing brigade and divisional troops. The trophy was awarded with great difficulty, because by the date of the championship game only the left and right fielders of the 2nd Canadian Machine Gun Battalion's team had not been laid up by Spanish influenza.<sup>67</sup> The Haldane cup was the last flourish of Flanders baseball.<sup>68</sup>

The armistice sent military baseball down two divergent paths. One, centred in London, was based on the optimistic belief that Canadian and American matches had laid permanent English roots for baseball. The other was subordinate to repatriating the troops. The CMAA became particularly important because with the end of fighting, men were increasingly reluctant to submit to the routine of military drill. Therefore, in early March 1919 the General Staff once again encouraged all units to join the CMAA and to provide unfettered access to sport.<sup>69</sup> In response to the latter belief, an Anglo-American Baseball League was formed in early 1919, scheduling matches between all-star Canadian and American teams on weekends and holidays at Stamford Bridge and intended for the "entertainment and recreation of the American and Canadian forces still here in the neighbourhood of London."<sup>70</sup> Once again the season opened with a Canadian Sports Day in London on 24 May, though the opposing teams were now made up of North American men, most of them recently released soldiers, who had gone up to Oxford and Cambridge universities.<sup>71</sup>

The London league motored along healthily that summer, though throughout the CEF opportunities to play baseball probably decreased as more and more troops were sent

home. As units were pulled out of Flanders they were directed to send their sports equipment to central storage depots from which the anticipated armies of occupation could be supplied. Though the total number of matches declined, in specific areas of the Canadian forces, access to baseball probably increased. For instance, the baseball sub-committee of the Kinmel Park Canadian Athletic Association was organised in March 1919, adopted a league structure, commissioned medals, and built diamonds in time for the start of play on Easter Monday. Men passing through Kinmel on their way back to Canada would be able to play the game. Meanwhile, once-important centres of military baseball closed down, like Seaford whose league wound up with a 'Peace Day' sporting gala on 5 June.<sup>72</sup>

Despite their initial reluctance, military commanders had responded to the physical desires of their men for baseball. But as we have seen, to Victorian and Edwardian Anglophiles sport had also been an allegory for war. As such it had bequeathed a lexicon of military words to British troops. Canadians employed many of these universal terms, calling war 'the game' or 'a sport', but they supplemented them with an equal number of terms drawn from baseball. Hence the first trip to Flanders was sometimes referred to as "the rookie season," a man died when his "next innings is called," artillery barrages were "home runs" and ineffective pitching in military baseball leagues was said to consist of "duds."<sup>73</sup> Canadian soldiers' use of familiar, benign baseball images mitigated, if only briefly, the reality of war. Though the CMAA had formalised the relationship between participatory and professional military baseball, it never succeeded in its implicit goal of infusing the North American game with Muscular Christian ideals. As a result, there was no baseball equivalent to the apotheosis of the English ideal represented by Captain Wilfred Nevill of the 8th East Surreys whose men had marched into no-man's-land on 1 July 1916 dribbling the soccer balls he had provided for them.<sup>74</sup> If the sentiments embodied in *Vitae Lampada* remained typically British, then a Canadian parody of the poem from January 1918, testifies to the Dominion's growing cultural autonomy based in part on a bemusement with English ideals and a fatalism drawn from years of trench stalemate.

When the world seems all against you,  
When the catcher throws the game,  
And the bleachers get to growling',  
Keep on playin' just the same.

When your battin' eye has left you,  
And you couldn't hit the moon.  
Don't cuss the ump: just whistle,  
Even if you ain't in tune.

When you tie 'em in the seventh  
With a man on every sack,  
And your best man fans, don't wobble,  
Just stiffen up your back.

That's the thing that every rookie  
Learns before he makes a name -  
Even if you feel it's hopeless,  
Keep-a-fighting! Play the game!<sup>75</sup>

The wartime desire for baseball amongst Canadian troops was not anticipated in August 1914. Like Newbolt's subaltern, athletes were supposed to drop their bats and apply the moral lessons they had learned through sport to the war. Undoubtedly this impulse animated many of the officers who first championed Canadian military sport. In addition, sport helped to encouraged group cohesion. But like any citizen army, the CEF was composed of men from all sectors of society who had never anticipated military careers. They had joined initially in anticipation of a short, fast-moving campaign. Trench warfare bore little relation to nineteenth century heroic ideals, while the system of rotations from front line to rear rest areas gave men predictable time away from immediate danger. As a result baseball was encouraged by individual officers as a popular and useful way in which to fill men's time. For those who played, baseball was fun. However, as the war dragged on, the game became an increasingly powerful and immediate representation of home. Though the CMAA's *Guide* continued to advocate Anglophile sporting beliefs, its most important impact was as an official sanction for a Canadian quasi-professional baseball.

Thanks in part to American neutrality at the start of the war, Canadian society was not riven by the question of sport in the same manner as other parts of the empire. This difference in outlook became more stark over the years. While

there were British and Australian military sports leagues, professional and spectator soccer, rugby and cricket had all ceased by the spring of 1915, after which fans had to content themselves with carnival matches, women's leagues and occasional top-flight contests between teams of star players. Baseball traced a different trajectory between 1914 and 1918. As they had in prewar Canada, troops watched their local teams and followed the American professional leagues from afar. The resemblance to Edwardian Canada was enhanced in the spring of 1916 thanks to the regular "professional" matches by many of Canada's most talented players. Once the United States entered the war, North American troops in England had access to the sport at a level and frequency of play that was comparable to the highest professional leagues. For Canadians who did not live along the American border, these all-star matches were probably the best baseball they had ever seen. In this entirely unforeseen way baseball's immediate identifications with home helped bridge the distance between Canada and the battlefield.

To argue that baseball was used in some *dirigiste* manner to champion Canadian nationalism is grossly reductionist. However, veterans shared an understanding of baseball's role in the war. As Lester Pearson testified, this understanding could be exploited in civilian life. Baseball's ability to recall Canada, home and peace comforted men while its expressions gave them a vocabulary with which to express and suppress their experiences at the front. Canadians played other sports, but none so often as baseball. Nor did any sport rival baseball as an ironic allegory for the war. Because baseball was publicly endorsed by war leaders and civilians, popular with the men and emotionally tied to home, both Pearson and his interviewer understood the small but discernible portion represented by the game in the national identity that, in Arthur Lower's lapidary phrase, was "carried back to Canada in the knapsacks of Canadian troops."<sup>76</sup>

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